

Widespread use of online worship following the coronavirus lockdown has helped ‘set free’ previously overlooked gifts of Christians with disabilities, the Church of England’s weekly online service will hear.

Rev Zoe Heming, a Vicar in Shropshire, in the Diocese of Lichfield, and a wheelchair user who lives with chronic pain, will lead the service with contributions, testimony and readings from people with disabilities and long-term illness.

In her introductory remarks, she will say that the pandemic has hit the most vulnerable hardest. But she will talk about how online worship has helped many Christians with disabilities – previously living in ‘permanent lockdown’ - to fully participate in worship for the first time.

“We know that coronavirus has hit the most vulnerable members of the community the hardest. It has changed so much about how we live and how we worship together,” she will say.

“For so many people who were already living in a more permanent lockdown and isolation through disability and long term illness - and often through inaccessible church buildings and services - like never before, previously over looked and wasted gifts have been set free to be a blessing to our church.”

The service, with the theme of belonging, is to be broadcast from 9am on Sunday on the [Church of England’s website](#), [Facebook page](#) and [YouTube channel](#).

Describing her own experiences, Rev Zoe will say: “Living with chronic pain for many years and becoming a wheelchair user has been a journey of faith - a painful journey – that has led me to discover new gifts and my own prejudices and the things and barriers that exclude people like me from being able to fully participate and belong to the Church.”

She will add: “The Christian faith teaches us that everyone is made in the image of God.”

The service will feature testimony and a poetry reading from Church of England lay minister Peter Philips, from Lichfield, a retired social worker and prison chaplain, who has Motor Neurone Disease.

He will say: “My health has deteriorated over the last 18 months or so but what has been more remarkable is that my life has been completely changed – for the better.”

“I believe that through each one of us God is working and calling us to get out there and proclaim His Kingdom here on earth.”

[Members of the Wave Community](#) will read the Parable of the Workers in the Vineyard from the Gospel of St Matthew. Prayer will be read by Ian Grantham, who is housebound, with Zoe Corney, who lives with ME, who will read the Lord’s Prayer.

The UK Makaton Blessing will also feature at the conclusion of the service.

Notes to editors

Explore the full range of [digital resources](#) provided by the Church of England.

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